

****ATTENTION****

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CONTROLLING NUISANCE EASTERN GRAY SQUIRRELS

Many people enjoy feeding squirrels in the park. Who hasn't laughed at their antics as they beg for peanuts? But in urban areas of western Washington, the squirrel you have been encouraging is not a welcome native. In fact, the Eastern Gray Squirrel has become a serious nuisance in many areas of Tacoma, Seattle, and Everett.

The Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) was first introduced around the turn of the century when several were released in the arboretum of the University of Washington. Eastern Gray Squirrels are adapted to the eastern United States where many natural predators keep their numbers in check. Without these natural restraints in urban areas of western Washington, they soon flourished to the point where they drove out our native Western Gray, Douglas, and Flying Squirrels. Because of their large size and aggressive behavior, Eastern Gray Squirrels are now the dominant squirrel species in our cities and towns around Puget Sound.

Besides the serious detrimental effects on our native squirrel populations, the Eastern Gray Squirrel has also become a nuisance and a possible public health problem for homeowners and gardeners. The Washington State Department of Wildlife gets hundreds of complaints from frustrated citizens regarding squirrels chewing holes in eaves and roofs to gain access to attics for nesting, devastating tulips and other planted bulbs, killing the eggs and young birds of robins and other native songbirds, and even endangering homes by chewing electrical wiring.

The Eastern Gray Squirrel is firmly established here and can never be completely eradicated. However, their numbers can be held in check and the problems they cause can be minimized by following these hints:

1. **DON'T FEED** neighborhood squirrels. There is plenty of natural food available for them to eat. Feeding promotes overpopulation, which increases nuisance problems (those excess squirrels need someplace to nest when all the natural tree cavities are occupied -- maybe your attic looks like a good squirrel nursery!). Overpopulation resulting from feeding of neighborhood squirrels can also cause outbreaks of disease due to overcrowding. Bird feeders can inadvertently become smorgasbords for squirrels unless they are placed so squirrels can't gain access and a catch pan is used to keep seeds from dropping to the ground.

2. GARDENS, BULBS, AND FRUIT TREES: Bulbs, seeds, and seedlings can be protected by placing a wire cage over them. Be sure the edges are well fastened to the ground. Trees have to be trimmed to eliminate access -- keep limbs away from fences and the ground. A metal skirt 24 inches wide should be placed around the trunks about two feet off the ground.
3. ATTICS: Ask yourself how the squirrels got into your attic in the first place. Then look for small openings where the roof and chimney meet and be sure the flashing is secure. Check the roof edge near the gutters -- squirrels can get in by lifting shingles at the roof edge, so make sure shingles are nailed down. Squirrels may also enlarge existing cracks and openings in walls, eaves, and roofs. Check for signs of gnawing, such as teeth marks and wood chips. When openings are located, close them with sheet metal or hardware cloth. To reduce access to the attic, trim tree limbs and shrubs away from the sides of the house. Also install freely rotating plastic pipe (about two-foot sections) on wires leading to the house so that the squirrels will have a difficult time securing a firm foothold. Nesting squirrels can sometimes be driven out of attics with moth crystals, lights, radios, or cats.

If all these suggestions fail to dissuade Eastern Gray Squirrels from damaging your house or yard, then trapping is the last resort. Cage traps baited with peanut butter on small pieces of bread or whole nuts are the most effective means of capture.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: _____

